

TITLE OF THE INVENTION:

"A CONTROL KNOB OF THE RETRACTABLE TYPE WITH SLOWED-DOWN EXTRACTION, IN PARTICULAR FOR AN ELECTRICAL HOUSEHOLD  
5 APPLIANCE"

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The present invention relates to a control knob of the retractable type for electrical household appliances,  
10 otherwise known as "push-push" knob, wherein the grip thereof is slowed down in its motion of extraction from the seat for housing the knob on the household appliance.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

15 It is known that, in all types of electrical household appliances (washing machines, dish washers, ovens, etc.) the control knob or knobs for controlling the various functions of the household appliance (for example, washing or cooking programs, temperature of the water, etc.) are controlled via  
20 rotatable grips. With increasing frequency said knobs are of the "retractable" type, in general obtained via a so-called "push-push" mechanism of a known type, which can be retracted into a purposely provided housing seat open at the front of the household appliance, for example made on the front panel,  
25 both for the purpose of reducing the overall dimensions and purely for reasons of styling.

Nowadays, there is strongly felt the need to enable extraction of the knob, i.e., of its gripping part, from the housing seat  
30 present on the household appliance, to be slowed down, in so far as this characteristic is particularly appreciated by users and, moreover, enables operation of the push-push mechanism to be rendered safer and more reliable. However, known devices for slowing down extraction cannot be applied to  
35 control knobs of electrical household appliances, basically both on account of their overall dimensions, given the

extremely small space available, and for reasons of cost.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The object of the present invention is to overcome the drawbacks described above by providing a control knob for household appliances of the type that can be retracted into a front seat of the household appliance by means a push-push device, the extraction thereof from the seat being slowed down by means of a mechanism which is reliable and presents small overall dimensions, low cost, and ease of installation.

In particular, it is an object of the invention to integrate the slowing-down mechanism in the very structure of the knob.

The present invention hence relates to a control knob of the retractable type for a household appliance as defined in Claim 1.

In particular, according to the invention, the control knob includes a cup-shaped grip mounted so that it can slide axially, against the action of elastic means, on a hub so as to define, between the grip and the hub, a closed chamber having a volume which depends upon the axial position of the grip on the hub. Between the hub and the grip there are moreover arranged sliding seal means for sealing the air-tight chamber, and a calibrated restriction is carried by anyone of said hub and said grip to connect permanently the inside of the chamber with the external environment in such a way as to cause a variation of pressure of the air contained in the chamber as a result of any axial movement of the grip with respect to the hub, in particular a negative pressure in said chamber as a result of a movement of the grip towards an extracted position.

In this way, when the cup-shaped grip, which constitutes the part of knob that is visible and can be actuated by the user,

(the rest of the knob being in use housed in a front seat of the household appliance) is pushed by the spring towards the extracted position (from the aforesaid seat), its motion of extraction from the seat, which entails a relative sliding with respect to the hub, brings about an increase in the volume of the aforesaid chamber, which cannot be compensated for immediately by the inlet of environmental air, on account of the presence of the sealing means and of the calibrated restriction. There is consequently brought about, in the chamber, a negative pressure, the value of which will depend upon the pressure drop through the calibrated restriction, which exerts a "sucking" action on the grip thus slowing down its motion of extraction.

15 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Further characteristics and advantages of the present invention will emerge clearly from the following description of non-limiting embodiments thereof, with reference to the figures of the annexed drawings, in which:

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- Figure 1 is a longitudinal elevation view, sectioned along the axis of symmetry, of a control knob made according to the invention, represented in the operating position, extracted with respect to a front seat provided in a household appliance, illustrated only partially and in exploded view;
- Figures 2 and 3 are views corresponding to that of Figure 1 of the control knob according to the invention, represented, respectively, in a resting position retracted within said seat of the household appliance, and in a retracted end-of-stroke position; and
- Figure 4 illustrates a detail of a possible variant of the knob of Figures 1-3.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

35 With reference to Figures 1 to 3, reference number 1 indicates, as a whole, a control knob of the retractable type

for an electrical household appliance 2 of a known type (for example a washing machine, a dish washer, or an oven), of which, for reasons of simplicity, there is illustrated in exploded view only a portion of a body 3, which is provided, generally in the area known as "front panel", with a seat that is open at the front 4 for housing the knob 1, within which there is set, on the opposite side of a front mouth 5 of the seat 4, a rotatable control pin 6 of the household appliance, of a known type, designed to control, according to its own angular position, at least one function of the household appliance (for example, a washing or cooking program, a washing or cooking temperature, etc.)

The knob 1 comprises a hub 10, having a substantially cylindrical symmetry, which can be connected angularly, in use, within the seat 4, with pin 6, and a grip 11, which is carried so that it is angularly fixed but can slide axially on a first end 12 of the hub 10 opposite to a second end 14 thereof, which is pre-arranged, in a known way and consequently not described in detail, for fixed angular connection with the pin 6.

The knob 1 is moreover provided with a mechanism 15 for extraction/retraction of the grip 11 from/into the seat 4, of the type referred to as "push-push", in the sense that both the movement of extraction of the knob 11 from the seat 4 and the movement of retraction of the knob 11 into the seat 4, substantially flush with the outer front surface of the body 3 (Figure 2), are controlled via pressure exerted in a direction parallel to an axis of symmetry A of the knob 1 on the grip 11, in the sense of direction indicated by the arrow in Figure 1.

The push-push mechanism 15, of a type already known and that consequently will be described only briefly in what follows, comprises elastic means 20 set between the grip 11 and the pin

10, on the part of the end 12, and means 16, 18 for selective axial connection of the grip 11 to the hub 10, designed to block selectively the grip 11, against the action of the elastic means 20, in a first axial position (illustrated in  
5 Figure 1), in which the grip 11 projects in cantilever fashion from the end 12 of the hub 10 and is set, in use, at least partially outside the seat 4, and in a second axial position (illustrated in Figure 2), in which the grip 11 is fitted on the hub 10, substantially so that it occupies the entire end  
10 12 thereof, and is, in use, retracted back into the seat 4, in the aforesaid position where it is substantially flush with the body 3 of the household appliance 2.

The grip 11 is cup-shaped, has its concavity facing the hub  
15 10, and comprises a sleeve 22 extending axially in a cantilever fashion inside the concavity of the grip 11, the sleeve 22 being slidably coupled, substantially without any play (except for the play due to the normal tolerances of fabrication) on an outer cylindrical side surface 23 of the  
20 hub 10, for guiding the movement of axial sliding of the grip 11 with respect to the hub 10 along the axis A.

For the above purpose, the end 12 of the hub 10 has, towards the grip 11, a cylindrical portion 24 of reduced diameter  
25 (i.e., smaller than the outer diameter of the hub 10), fitted on which are the aforesaid elastic means 20, in the case in point formed by a helical spring housed within the sleeve 22 and set pack-tightened between an axial shoulder 25 of the hub 10, constituted by an annular separation step between the  
30 cylindrical portion 24 and the rest of the end 12, and an end wall 26 of the grip 11.

The spring 20 is mounted pre-loaded so as to maintain the grip 11, in use, normally in the extracted position illustrated in  
35 Figure 1.

Made on the outer side surface 23 of the hub is a plane desmodromic path 16 of a known type, provided with shoulders for axial arrest 27, 28, 29 (see Figure 1). In a position corresponding to the path 16, the sleeve 22 of the grip 11 is 5 provided with an idle pin 18, which is carried, so that it moves in a direction transverse to the path 16, by a circumferential slot 30 (see Figure 3), in which the pin 18 is engaged with play. The pin 18 can consequently slide, as a result of a relative axial motion of the grip 11 with respect 10 to the hub 10, along two parallel branches of the path 16 (not illustrated) so as to engage selectively the shoulders 27, 28 and 29, thus providing, in a known way, the axial arrest or blocking of the grip 11 in the positions of Figures 1 and 2, against the shoulders 27 and 28, respectively, and cyclical 15 displacement of the pin 18 in the slot 30 between the two branches of the path 16, against the shoulder 29.

According to the invention, the grip 11 and the hub 10 are shaped so as to define, between them, a closed chamber 40 20 having a volume which depends upon the axial position of the grip 11 on the hub 10. For example, the volume of the chamber 40 is maximum when the grip 11 is in the extracted position of Figure 1, is close to the minimum when the grip 11 is in the retracted position of Figure 2, and is minimum when the grip 25 11 is in a position of end of stroke, as illustrated in Figure 3, in which the pin 18 engages the shoulder 30 so as to be displaced thereby (as already mentioned) between said two branches of the desmodromic path 16.

30 Furthermore, arranged between the hub 10 and the grip 11 are, according to the invention, sliding seal means 41 for sealing the air-tight chamber 40, and a calibrated restriction 42, which is carried selectively either by the hub 10 or by the grip 11 (in the non-limiting case in point illustrated, by the 35 hub 10, as it will be explained hereinafter) to connect permanently the inside of the chamber 40 with the external

environment in such a way as to enable the environmental air to flow from and into the chamber 40 only with a pre-set pressure drop, which is consequently such as to cause a variation of pressure of the air contained in the chamber 40 as a result of any axial movement of the grip 11 with respect to the hub 10.

In particular, the end 12 of the hub 10 is provided at the front (hence also through the cylindrical portion 24) with a blind hole 44 (indicated only in Figure 1), engaged with radial play by a rod 45, which is fixedly carried by the grip 11 and extends axially in cantilever fashion inside it, coaxially with respect to the sleeve 22 and located therein.

According to the main characteristic of the invention, a free end 46 of the rod 45 carries in a fluid-tight way an annular gasket 41 providing a radial seal, which slidably co-operates with a cylindrical side wall of the blind hole 44 in such a way that the latter, together with the free end 46 of the rod 45, defines the chamber 40 which has a volume that depends upon the axial position of the grip 11 on the hub 10.

An end wall 47 (indicated only in Figure 2) of the blind hole 44 is constituted by a separation diaphragm with a known seat 48 for connection of the hub 10 (see Figure 1), which is designed to receive, in use, the control pin 6 of the household appliance and is made at the front inside the end 14. The end wall 47 is provided with a calibrated hole 42 (calibrated in the sense that it has a pre-set cross section for passage made with narrow tolerances) constituting, in use, the aforesaid calibrated restriction designed to enable, with a pre-set pressure drop, passage of environmental air away from and towards the chamber 40, in the case in point through the connection seat 48.

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Preferably, to enable a more effective operation of the

invention, the radial-seal gasket 41 is a bell-shaped lipped gasket, mounted on the rod 45 so as to have the concavity facing the grip 11, in particular facing the concavity of the grip 11.

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According to the embodiment illustrated in Figures 1-3, the lipped gasket 41 is fixed at the front in cantilever fashion to the free end 46 of the rod 45 via connection means, in the case in point a screw 50 with countersunk head.

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According to what is illustrated at an enlarged scale in Figure 4, instead, the lipped gasket 41 can be carried by the free end 46 of the rod 45 inserted via snap-action in a radial annular seat 51 made thereon. In this case, the rod 45, or at 15 least its end 46, will be made full solid, whilst in the case of the embodiment of Figures 1-3, the rod 45 can be made hollow.

In the latter case, the rod 45 and the sleeve 22 may 20 conveniently be made of a single piece via a connecting portion 55 (indicated only in Figure 3) to form a single element for connection to the hub 10, said connection element being mounted fixedly via snap-action within a sleeve-like seat 56 (see Figure 3) of the cup-shaped grip 11, said seat 25 being provided, in cantilever fashion, inside said grip. In this way, it is possible to apply on a single knob mechanism grips having different shapes and/or dimensions, or else bearing different indications, according to the type of household appliance 2 on which the knob 1 according to the 30 invention is to be applied.

Operation of the knob 1 described is evident from the structural description provided. Normally, the knob 1 is in the resting configuration of Figure 2, in which it does not 35 present any bulk at all on the outside of the household appliance 2. As a result of a front thrust exerted by the user

(for example, with just one finger) in the direction indicated by the arrow on the grip 11, which is accessible through the mouth 5, the knob 1 is brought, by compressing the spring 20, into the end-of-stroke configuration of Figure 3, thus  
5 abandoning the axial-blocking shoulder 28. The spring 20 is consequently free to push the grip 11 towards the extracted position of Figure 1, outside the seat 4 and through the mouth 5, until the pin 18 is brought against the axial-blocking shoulder 27 so causing blocking of the knob 1 in the  
10 configuration illustrated in Figure 1.

During said movement of extraction of the grip 11 from the seat 4, the grip 11 slides axially with respect to the hub 10, which remains stationary, thus producing a progressive  
15 increase in the volume of the chamber 40. This causes in the chamber 40, as a result of the delay with which the environmental air can flow therein through the calibrated restriction (hole) 42, a negative pressure, which exerts a "sucking" action on the grip 11, in the case in point the end  
20 46 of the rod 45 fixed thereto, so slowing down the movement of extraction in the desired way.

Once the grip 11 is in its extracted position, it can be gripped by the user and rotated, thus causing rotation of the  
25 hub 10 and of the control pin 6.

In order to bring the knob 1 back into the retracted configuration of Figure 2, it is sufficient for the user to press the grip 11 again in the direction of the arrow (Figure  
30 1) in order to cause retraction thereof, with consequent compression of the spring 20. During said motion, the air will come out with some delay from the chamber 40, which is thus reduced in volume, through the hole 42, bringing about an over-pressure in the chamber 40 with respect to the  
35 environmental pressure; this will cause an increase in the resistance perceived by the user necessary to bring the knob

to the end-of-stroke position (configuration of Figure 3). Said increase does not, however, represent a disadvantage, in so far as it enables any accidental retraction of the knob 1 to be prevented without the need to use an excessively stiff

5 spring 20.

Once the end-of-stroke position has been reached, the user may release the pressure on the grip 11, and the spring 20 will bring the knob 1 back into the configuration represented in  
10 Figure 2, i.e., blocked against the shoulder 28.